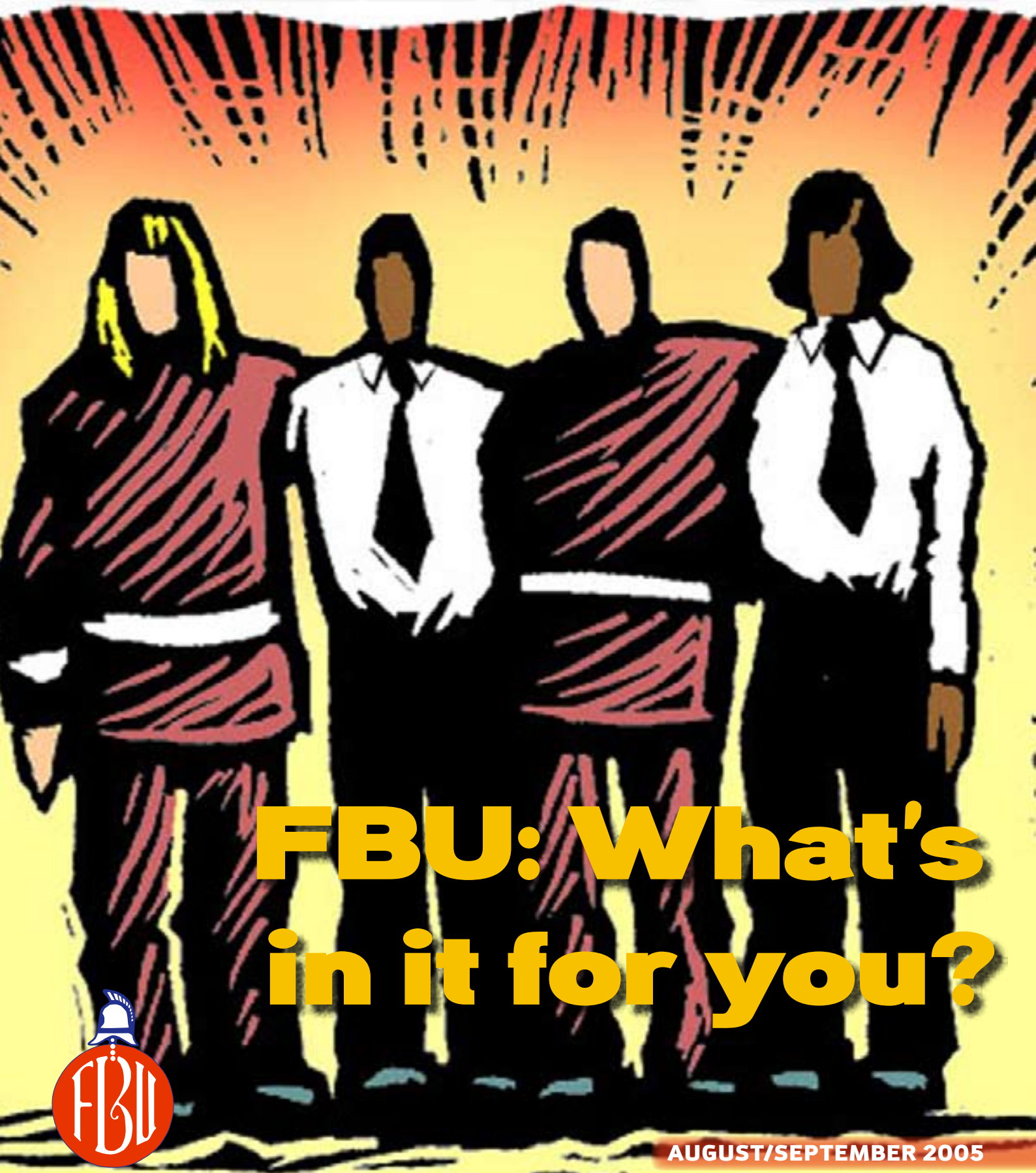


ALERTER



**FBU: What's
in it for you?**



AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2005

The Fire Brigades Union is the only trade union recognised at national and local level for negotiating working conditions for firefighters and emergency control room operators in the UK irrespective of the duty system worked. Here's what the Union has been doing for members and the benefits it offers

NATIONAL LEVEL INITIATIVES

- The securing of 120 hours cover maximum requirement for entitlement to full retaining fees. This has resulted in a very substantial number of retained duty system personnel seeing an increase in their retaining fees of £625.00 per year (at firefighter level) on top of agreed percentage pay rises.

- A substantial investment in the long running campaign to secure access to the firefighters pension scheme and a commitment to pursue this to successful conclusion.

- A proactive approach to breaking down the barriers between differing duty systems. After all, a firefighter is a firefighter is a firefighter!

LOCAL LEVEL INITIATIVES

- Ensuring that brigades keep to nationally agreed rates of pay and personnel receive the correct hourly rate for all activities e.g. station cleaning and any community fire safety duties undertaken.

- Negotiating additional days annual leave for retained duty system personnel above current Grey Book provision.

- Negotiating additional paid administration time for retained duty system JO's outside of the times allocated for drill nights.

- Negotiating payment for branch officials working on stations on the retained duty system who attend brigade management and union meetings on behalf of the members

on their stations. In many brigades, agreements have been made to pay missed fire calls to officials who attend their brigade meetings to represent their members.

- Ensuring that robust "by pay period" procedures for the protection of pay for members that qualify under the new payments systems are implemented. These guarantee that no member working the retained duty system is adversely affected by any of the new pay rates.

- Successfully fighting off changes in working practices that would have led to the degrading of our members working conditions and decreases in their remuneration for like for like work.

REPRESENTATION

In all brigades across the country, we have successfully represented or advised numerous members on employment issues, including medical appeals, pension appeals and disciplinary hearings resulting from both on duty and off duty incidents. With the resources and expertise of our solicitors, Thompsons, who specialise in dealing with legal work for trade unions, we can ensure that members get the best advice available despite the costs.

Only very recently, our officials in one of our brigades successfully overturned a management decision to enforce the retirement of a firefighter working the retained duty system on grounds of ill health. Although initially the case had looked difficult to defend our officials worked very hard to ensure that they got a result that proved our member was indeed fit enough to remain operational.

In many of our brigades the majority of FBU work is concerned with looking after day to day issues appertaining specifically to firefighters working the retained duty system.

COMMUNICATION

THE FBU are very proactive at keeping members informed. National, Regional and Brigade circulars are regularly emailed or posted into the stations and to home addresses. The Alerter magazine - written for firefighters working the retained duty system by firefighters working the retained duty system - is now posted to all members at their home address. Input from all members is actively encouraged.

The FBU operates an electronic mailing list that allows members to receive all electronic correspondence directly to their home email address. To add your name to this list visit www.fbu.org.uk then enter your email address into the box in the bottom left of this web page. This will ensure you receive all electronic correspondence sent out from our head office. You can also contact any of your officials listed at the back page of Alerter to discuss any issues or concerns you have.



ACCIDENTS & INJURIES

WE have been particularly successful in pursuing personal accident claims for members and their families. Examples include:

- Securing £250,000 in compensation and a pension for a member working the retained duty system, when they were injured at an incident. This had resulted in them being medically retired from both the brigade and their full-time employment.

- Successfully representing a member working the retained duty system, when they were injured on the second day of their initial training course. At the time they were injured, they had not even paid their first monthly subscription fee to the union. The legal costs incurred to pursue this case to a successful conclusion were approximately £70,000. Without the assistance of the FBU our member would not have been able to fight their case.

- Pursuing an industrial accident claim for a member working the retained duty system, whose injuries were sustained in their primary employment.

With regard to personal accidents, the FBU will represent both you and your family, charging no fee and taking no part of any compensation award. For further details please visit our website www.fbu.org.uk and click on the Legal Services link.



It's in it for you?

THE ACCIDENT AND INJURY FUND (AIF)

THE death benefit is payable upon the death of a member and does not have to arise from 'on-duty' activity although there are exclusions as explained in rule 30 (6) of the FBU rule book. Payments are,

- Member's death benefit to nominee is 125% of a Firefighter's (competent) annual salary.

- Member's death benefit per child to nominee is 125% of a Firefighter's (competent) annual salary.

- Death of Child of member is 35% of a Firefighter's (competent) annual salary.

UNDER the Accident and Injury Fund there are payments for disablement. These are:

- Member's temporary disablement is 25% of a Firefighter's (competent) weekly rate of pay for a maximum period of 52 weeks for any one incident.

- Member's permanent disablement is 50% of a Firefighter's (competent) annual salary.

LIFELONG LEARNING

THE union committed to lifelong learning for all its members. It is rolling out opportunities to boost skills and education across the UK with more than £1 million in funding.

Of particular interest to firefighters working the retained duty system, the Union launched earlier this year an e-learning project, in conjunction with the Scottish Union Learning Fund project and the Scottish Fire Services College, (Gullane).

The SFSC has been at the forefront of developing a Virtual College that will provide online courses that meet the requirements of learners as they progress through the Fire Service Role Maps.

The Virtual College will open up learning access for all members of the UK fire and rescue service, especially those members who cannot attend residential courses. In particular, e-learning may prove to be a key initiative in supporting the retained service in IPDS, workplace development schemes and S/NVQ's.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
visit www.fbu.org.uk.

INVOLVEMENT

WE encourage all our branches and members to take part in the union's business. Your officials both local and national will visit ANY branch if requested to do so. If you need to request a visit to your station please phone or e-mail your local officials in the first instance.

Members of the National Retained Committee will attend your brigade's meetings to answer directly any questions you may have regarding any issues relating to firefighters working the retained duty system.

Member participation is vital to the successes we achieve on your behalf. To ensure that you will not be financially disadvantaged by attending meetings expenses are paid to officials and representatives who attend meetings on behalf of our members.

MEMBERSHIP FEES

FBU Membership is cheaper!

Firefighters working the retained duty system are frequently being misinformed that FBU membership costs significantly more than that of the only other organisation which says it defends and advances the interests of firefighters working the retained duty system.

The cost of FBU membership for members working the retained duty system is only £6.67, £1.43 per month cheaper. If you also consider the resources and backup available then there really is only one choice for effective representation and that is the FBU.

Subscriptions to the FBU for all services and benefits on offer to members amounts to £10.18 per month. Consider the additional services and benefits that this extra £2.08 per month offers. As well as the AIF benefits, it enables our union and its officials to operate highly visual and effective campaigns to protect and promote our members interests at local, regional and national levels.

JOIN US

IF you are not a member, fill in the application form included in this issue of *Alerter* and send it to FBU head office: John McGhee, Fire Brigades Union, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road Kingston Upon Thames, Surrey, KT2 7AE. Application forms can also be obtained by calling FBU head office on 0208 541 1765 or from the FBU website (www.fbu.org.uk). If you are a member but know a firefighter working the retained system who isn't, please pass on this information. Note: Fill in sections 1,2,3 & 4 of the form, sign it (if there are FBU members on your station ask them to sign in the appropriate places in section 3 and at the end of the form). The FBU will get in touch shortly afterwards confirming membership and to process payment of membership fees.



24/7 FIRE COVER

With the support of the FBU and the local community, Bewdley fire station in Hereford and Worcester continues to provide 24/7 cover and firefighters working the retained duty system there, will continue to fight off any threat of closure, says Mike Petersen.

BEWDLEY fire station, part of Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service, was rebuilt in the early sixties on the current Dog Lane site and up until two years ago a shortage of resources meant we had found it difficult to provide 24 hour cover. Twelve years ago the station, along with several others in Hereford & Worcester, was put forward for closure. The brigade were going to do a deal with telephone company BT to allow their private fire engine to respond to fires in the community. But we had strong support from

the FBU, as well as from the local community which we serve. After a round of well attended public meetings – we had a public forum in the pump bay, chaired by the CFO – the message to the brigade was clear. The proposals were ditched and a meeting was called between the FBU and the junior minister for fire at the House of Commons. Instead of cuts, Hereford & Worcester received extra funding to create eight new posts and build a new retained fire station in Peterchurch.

Now, we in Bewdley are providing 24/7

cover with a full compliment of thirteen crew members, lead by watch manager, Rod Maiden. We serve the communities of Bewdley and the Wyre Forest. We also assist our colleagues in Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service. The emphasis now is on maintaining the 24/7 cover. We are in a close proximity to two other stations and there is that concern that under the local integrated risk management plan (IRMP), we may again be earmarked for closure. Again we are seeking the support of the FBU.

I came to Bewdley three years ago from



Bewdley firefighters on a recent drill night. Watch manager Rod Maiden (above), firefighter Mike Petersen (below).

VER



Walsall in the West Mids, where I spent eight years as a Special Constable. While in Bewdley I found that the fire station was short of crew members. So I became a fire fighter working the retained duty system. Joining amidst the recent industrial action, I took the opportunity to get to know my new wholetime colleagues at Kidderminster. I spent a couple of hours with them here and there on the picket line and supported the fight for professional pay.

Here at Bewdley, we are community firefighters. We are – and have proven that we

are – an asset, not just to the Hereford & Worcester Combined Fire Authority, but to many of the communities we serve – particularly those bordering Worcestershire and Shropshire around the Wyre Forest. As long as our employers continue to realise this, and along with the continued support of the FBU, I'm sure we'll be here providing a professional service for a long time yet.

FIREFIGHTER MIKE PETERSEN works at Bewdley Fire Station

A firefighter is a firefighter is a firefighter

ONE BASIC principle of the FBU is that a firefighter is a firefighter is a firefighter. It does not matter which duty system you are working.

There are long-standing old fashioned views in fire authorities that somehow retained firefighters are not quite the same as their wholetime colleagues. This has led to problems such as the lack of a pension and inadequate time set aside for training.

They are not the only problems. This is a view the union utterly rejects. It has no room in a genuinely modern fire service.

The professionalism and dedication you bring to the fire service needs to be fully understood, fully appreciated and fully promoted. And we want more retained firefighters joining the union.

To us the benefits are obvious. The stronger we are as a group, the better we can promote your aspirations and the safety of the communities we serve.

Divide and rule is a favourite tactic of brigades and one which we must work against.

In the fire service, the FBU is the only game in town.

Retained firefighters can face the same difficulties in the workplace as any other firefighter. That can be a disciplinary issue, employment relations, health and safety or a problem over the rank to role process.

The union has the best trained local officials, many with years of

***We want more
retained firefighters
joining the FBU***



***We represent
everyone in the fire
service and we will
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experience in the service and representing those who work in it. We are going to co-ordinate more at brigade level to ensure that that full account is taken of the needs of those working the retained duty system.

Our local officials are backed up by a national team which has access to specialist advice on fire service and other issues. We offer the best legal and other protection for members, using the best lawyers.

At local level we also have the strongest influence on policy areas whether that is health and safety,

***We offer the best legal and other
protection for members***

operational issues or your local Integrated Risk Management Plan. At national level we are by far the most influential voice on behalf of the fire service and the communities we serve.

So, if you know a non-member, recruit them. If you know someone who has drifted out of membership, encourage them back in.

We represent everyone in the fire service and we will continue to do so.

***Matt Wrack,
FBU General Secretary***

Highlands & Islands launches £4m recruitment drive

THE Highlands and Islands fire and rescue service has launched a major drive to recruit firefighters into the retained duty system following an injection of £4 million funding from the Scottish Executive. Around 60 out of some 100 volunteer fire stations in the brigade have been earmarked to become retained stations with a potential 600 new recruits to the retained duty system. The funding from the Scottish Executive came after intensive lobbying efforts by the FBU to boost resources to the overstretched fire and rescue services in the Highlands & Islands.

Over the past few months the brigade at district level (groups of 2-3 stations) has been advertising a large number of retained posts. Many volunteer firefighters are taking up the

opportunity to join the retained service. The remaining 40 odd volunteer stations have seen their responsibilities downgraded and rather than attend property fires are restricted to taking on community fire education, wildfire and road traffic accident (RTA) roles on a sliding scale, depending on the volunteer unit.

The Union is working hard to have these stations upgraded to retained status too. It is also pressing for more funding for the new retained stations to ensure they are able to operate as effectively for their communities as possible.

"The FBU has worked hard to secure additional funding for the fire and rescue service, which has been run on a shoestring for far too long," says Frasier Parr, FBU brigade

chair for Highlands & Islands. "We welcome the upgrading of the volunteer stations to retained status. Communities where the new retained stations have been established are a lot safer in the event of a fire or road traffic accident," says Frasier Parr, FBU brigade chair for Highlands & Islands. "We now want to see the remaining volunteer stations upgraded and additional resources to ensure the new retained stations are up to spec and able to provide the fire cover local communities expect and deserve."

The FBU launched a national campaign in autumn 2004 calling for action over dire establishment levels of the retained duty system in the UK fire and rescue service. For more information visit www.fbu.org.uk

FBU fights Stornoway sackings

EIGHT firefighters working in retained fire stations in Stornoway sacked by Highland & Islands Fire Board are taking their battle for their jobs to Minister for Justice, Cathy Jamieson MSP. The firefighters lost an appeal in early June heard by five Fire Board councillors, who decided to uphold the decision of the Chief Officer, on a 3 to 2 majority decision, to sack the firefighters for failing to respond to a single fire call in October last year. All eight firefighters now intend to submit a further appeal

to the Minister for Justice, Cathy Jamieson MSP.

Roddy Robertson, FBU Scottish Chair said: "This decision is unheard of. These men have given 130 years service to their Community.

"To be sacked for failing to notify the Brigade of their availability on this one occasion, is scandalous. There is no Brigade Instruction or indeed any recognised Custom & Practice, yet the Fire Board considers their actions to constitute Gross Misconduct. It's an

absolute disgrace."

"This is on the back of seven years of managerial failures in Stornoway. The Brigade has now stated that they expect a minute to minute account of retained firefighters' availability. The detrimental consequences for all retained firefighters in Scotland are extremely worrying."

"We intend to appeal this decision to the Minister for Justice, whom we hope will apply common sense and fairness to this matter."

FBU e-learning pilot gets early positive feedback

INITIAL feedback from the e-learning pilot project involving twelve firefighters working the retained duty system has been positive.

Part of the Union's drive to promote lifelong learning through the Union Learning Fund, the pilot project is run jointly by the FBU and the Scottish Fire Services College and taking place at Rothbury (Northumberland FRS) and Braemar (Grampian).

The pilot (Command and Control module) started on 16 May 2005 with visits to both stations, and was set to run until the end of July.

Regular visits are being carried out by

support staff to ensure that the 12 FBU members are accessing the website and don't have any problems with the IT hardware and software.

"I have enjoyed the course, especially the flexible way I could access learning both at work and home," says Geoff Davis a leading firefighter from Rothbury.

"Using the computer was hard work at first, but with the help of Claire I have started to progress the course and hope to have it completed by the end of July," said Andrew Slassor, a firefighter from Rothbury.



Geoff Davis, a leading firefighter working the retained duty system at Rothbury, Northumberland fire and rescue service, accessing SFSC website e-learning

■ Contact details of your ULF representative and more information on the FBU's lifelong learning agenda can be found at www.fbu.org.uk - look under the Member Services section.

Participation is key

Morris Butterfield is retiring as EC member for retained. He says all retained members should vote in the ballot for his replacement

BY the time this Alerter reaches home addresses and branches the election for the position of Executive Council (EC) member for firefighters working the retained duty system will have commenced. Age has caught up with me so I will be retiring

This election is very important to all members working the retained duty system because whoever is elected will be your voice on the EC of the FBU for the next four years on all retained issues and the many challenges ahead. You should not miss this opportunity to



make your choice. So please participate in the election process during the nomination and ballot stages.

For me it has been a long four years of meetings and thousands of miles of traveling to all parts of the UK. I have had to make difficult decisions during my time as the EC Member. I make no apologies for what I saw as the best outcome for all retained members.

Whoever is elected must work with the National Retained Committee and take all retained issues forward to ensure that: the 2003 Pay Agreement is adhered to; that a firefighter is a firefighter; and that there are no barriers to those working the retained duty system.

Whoever is elected must also ensure that our fight for equal pension rights continues. And they must build on the campaign the Union launched last autumn – and which is showing clear signs of success – for an end to unacceptable shortfall in establishment in the retained duty system.

It has not been any easy ride. But without the help of all officials within the FBU it would have been much worse. I thank you all for your support and advice and your continued support for all retained members.

Get in touch

ALERter WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU. Write in with your questions or comments and if you've a story to tell about what's happening in your neck of the woods, let us have it. Also send in your long service presentations and we'll publish them in the magazine. Email alerter@fbu.org.uk or write to Alerter, Fire Brigades Union, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston Upon Thames, Surrey, KT2 7AE.

FBU National Retained Committee

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